

Transcript

[return to index](#)

America's Enemy (1954-1967)

5 of 11

HO CHI MINH *In a war, it is natural that there are losses and sacrifices. Our people are determined to fight on. We will endure all sacrifice for ten years, 20 years or longer, until complete victory.*

PREMIER PHAM VAN DONG: Throughout Vietnam's history, this has always been the case. It was so in the past, it will be so in the future. This is something we can be sure of.

GENERAL VO NGUYEN GIAP: One of the most essential -- if not to say the most essential -- rule in Vietnamese military science, in war we have to win, absolutely have to win.

NARRATOR: In October 1954, after nine years of war, French troops left Hanoi. Ho Chi Minh had led the Communist-inspired Vietminh nationalists to victory.

A cease-fire agreement signed at Geneva provisionally partitioned Vietnam into two zones. Ho's forces were to regroup in the North and leave their families and unarmed comrades in the South. A nation-wide election to reunify Vietnam was to be held in two years. Colonial rule was ending.

MADAME NGUYEN THI DINH (National Liberation Front): The northern part of the country had been totally liberated. According to the agreement, in only two more years, the South too would be completely liberated. The people in the South truly believed that there would be a national reunification in two years.

NARRATOR: The United States, which had largely financed the French war, promised not to disrupt the Geneva agreements by force. Vice President Nixon flew to Saigon to dramatize America's support of South Vietnam's new leader, Ngo Dinh Diem, who had rigged a referendum and set up a separate South Vietnamese state.

PHAM VAN DONG: After the Geneva Conference, the United States pushed the French out of the South and backed Ngo Dinh Diem to organize a government there. Ngo Dinh Diem was a cruel and reactionary tyrant. He used extremely barbaric methods to repress the revolutionary movement and to stifle demands that the Geneva agreements be carried out.

NARRATOR: The Eisenhower Administration backed Diem's rejection of the nationwide elections called for at Geneva. With American aid and advisers, Diem strengthened his power, using soldiers and police who had formerly served the French.

MME. NGUYEN THI DINH: They arrested, imprisoned and assassinated former participants of the resistance against the French. And, they forcibly registered all families whose sons, husbands and other relatives had regrouped in the North.

MAJ. DUONG SANG: While I was in the North, I heard that people in the South were being killed in droves, among them members of my family. I was very worried, and my heart ached for them. I went to my superiors and volunteered to return to the South to fight in any way I could.

NARRATOR: Ho Chi Minh wanted a political solution. So did the Soviet Union and China, who feared a possible war with America.

Rural poverty was all too apparent. A decade earlier, a famine in the North had taken an estimated two million lives. Raising food production was a priority. The Hanoi leadership launched a program to distribute land to the peasants. The estates of rural landlords were shared out among three quarters of the peasantry. The political aim was to break the influence of the old landowning class.

HOANG LOC: A land reform team came from the central government to coordinate the program with the local inhabitants. The people in the area would then be invited to meetings where the poor and landless peasants would describe their situation. In this way, we found out how the rich exploited the poor and landless peasants.

With help from the government team, we classified the landlords in

different categories. Then the landlords were brought before a people's court set up in the village. Those found guilty of actual crimes were sent to jail.

NARRATOR: Following Chinese Communist practice, people's courts had to meet fixed quotas of criminal landlords. Thousands of innocent people were arrested, and many -- possibly between three and 15,000 -- were executed. Alarmed by the turmoil, the leadership curbed the excesses, calling them "serious mistakes."

North Vietnam's economy, ravaged by war and neglect, was being rebuilt.

The Hanoi leadership was coming under increased pressure from southerners to resume fighting. Finally, in 1959, they decided to back armed struggle in the South.

MME. NGUYEN THI DINH: The first battle took place in Bentre province. We attacked a company of the regime's self-defense forces, and took over a notorious police garrison. In only three hours, without any weapons of our own, we succeeded in capturing 30 guns.

NARRATOR: In 1960, the Communist Party created the National Liberation Front, a coalition of southern forces opposed to the Diem regime. Diem labeled it "the Vietcong." The Front called for Diem's overthrow, an end to foreign interference and the eventual peaceful reunification of Vietnam.

The United States sent more aid and advisers.

EARL YOUNG (U.S. Province Adviser, Long An): We continually were amazed at the professionalism -- the ability to be good psychologists -- that these people had. They knew exactly how to deal with the Vietnamese farmer. Now this the Americans generally never did, and the Vietnamese government might have but really wasn't that interested, so we found that a whole structure had been superimposed on this province, and it was a Vietcong structure -- Communist Vietcong structure. They had people at every level and they were running a shadow government coincidentally with the government's operation.

NARRATOR: To isolate them from the Vietcong, Diem shunted peasants into fortified villages called "strategic hamlets." Many peasants had resented the return of the landlords and the loss of land given to them earlier by the Vietminh.

EARLY YOUNG: There were some very substantial grievances which these people had. They had been perhaps moved off their land. They were being taxed unfairly. They were promised things which were never delivered. The Vietnamese military would perhaps molest their women, would steal their chickens, in general be obnoxious.

NARRATOR: The Saigon government tried to control the rural population as Vietcong teams assassinated local officials.

EARL YOUNG: They would send in a small squad of people -- maybe five or six men in the middle of the night. They would seize the hamlet chief in his house, haul him out to the center of the hamlet and convene the whole village to watch this, and then they would cut his head off. They would make him kneel down and they would shoot him in the head -- whatever technique they wanted to use -- and, of course, this frightened the Vietnamese.

Because of the insecurity in the countryside, the normal Vietnamese government civil servant, the teachers, the agricultural advisers, could not go into these hamlets. The provincial junkyard was littered with blown-up ambulances, blown-up education vehicles. They simply put mines in the road and as the government people went out to a hamlet, the Vietcong destroyed them and they put the fear of God in them.

NARRATOR (National Liberation Front Film): *Saigon's government army swept through the countryside, in search of Vietcong suspects.*

This film, released by the National Liberation Front in 1963, shows government officials torturing suspects by electrical shocks and hanging.

By now the Vietcong force had grown. Their objectives were the capture of government outposts and the destruction of strategic hamlets. Diem's army suffered from poor leadership and internal dissention. In late 1963, the United States encouraged a coup in which Diem's own officers killed

him.

The Vietcong at first depended on captured or homemade weapons and arms hidden after the Geneva agreements. But by early 1964, as the North Vietnamese commitment increased, men and equipment flowed south along an old supply route, the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Former Vietminh soldiers who had regrouped to the North were returning to fight. They counted on growing support from the southern population. Stepping up sabotage activities, they struck at the heart of Saigon, attacking American installations.

LAM SON NAO: When I worked on the docks, I collected information on American facilities, on all their ships and their military warehouses. I learned that the U.S.S. *Card* was coming up the river carrying all kinds of aircraft to kill the Vietnamese people. I was able to transform my anger into action when I was given the job of trying to blow up the ship. Using commando tactics, we entered into a sewer ...crawling along because it was so narrow. Sometimes we could walk by crouching.

After we had placed the two mines, I checked the automatic ignition device again. It was 2 a.m. when I finished checking everything. My comrade and I then began to crawl back to the other end of the sewage system.

When the mines exploded at exactly 3 a.m., the whole area was blacked out and the two of us were so happy knowing that our mission had been accomplished.

NARRATOR: In August 1964, President Johnson reacted to reports of a naval clash in the Gulf of Tonkin by ordering a reprisal air raid.

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON, August 1964: *Renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas and the Gulf of Tonkin have today required me to take action in reply.*

NARRATOR: U.S. aircraft were bombing North Vietnam for the first time.

EVERETT ALVAREZ (POW 1964-1973): Not until I was about halfway to our target area did I start to realize that this was actual combat. And the things that we had trained and prepared for, the eventual, the eventuality like this, I never really, you know, thought that it would really actually happen. But all of a sudden, here we were and I was in it.

PHAM VAN DONG: I was visiting Quang Ninh province, when suddenly I saw a formation of airplanes coming from the sea, flying straight toward the mining area. Then a fight broke out between the American airplanes and the Vietnamese air defenses.

EVERETT ALVAREZ: I was hit and the weirdest feeling... my airplane started to fall apart, I was over strange territory, you know, foreign territory, enemy territory.

PHAM VAN DONG: Shortly thereafter, an American airplane was shot down and its pilot captured. Before returning to Hanoi, I met with this pilot, Everett Alvarez. He was the first American pilot taken prisoner in Vietnam.

NARRATOR: A decade after the Geneva agreements, North Vietnam was under attack, its developing economy threatened. A decade during which land under irrigation had doubled, electrical production had increased tenfold.

Ho Chi Minh, who had devoted his life to winning independence, declared in 1964, "As long as the country is divided, as long as our compatriots continue to suffer, I can neither sleep well nor eat with any appetite." Ho personified the nationalist struggle, even for Vietnamese who feared communism. He inspired many southerners to fight.

TRAN NHAT BANG: I'll always remember August 1, 1964, when this village liberated itself. There were no revolutionary guerrillas or regular forces present. The villagers staged a spontaneous uprising. We were delighted. We convened a meeting of 2,000 people and introduced a revolutionary administration. We organized the people to dig trenches and tunnels to defend themselves against enemy artillery. Everyone dug booby traps and laid homemade mines. We knew that the enemy puppet troops would try to get revenge.

NARRATOR: The Saigon government troops faced traps and other

primitive weapons. The military force of the National Liberation Front, the People's Liberation Army, drew on experiences gained in fighting the French, paying meticulous attention to detail and planning.

American helicopters had given their enemy superior speed and mobility. They devised counter-tactics -- to wait and lure the helicopters within range.

By late 1964, Vietcong troops were fighting sustained battles against numerically superior and better-armed Saigon forces.

On December 28, some 1,500 Vietcong, armed with machine guns and recoil-less rifles, captured the village of Binh Gia, 40 miles southeast of Saigon.

On December 30, after U.S. helicopters flew in reinforcements, Saigon troops recaptured the village. The battle continued for five days. The Vietcong destroyed two South Vietnamese battalions, killing 158 soldiers and five American advisers.

By March 1965, U.S. Marines were in Vietnam... the first American combat troops to arrive. They had come as allies of South Vietnam. But to many peasants, they were yet another threatening foreign force.

Bienhoa, March 18, 1965.

The United States stepped up its bombing of the South, using more napalm and phosphorous bombs.

DUONG SANG: Unexploded American bombs and shells were dug up by the old people and the kids -- sawed up in order to get to the gun powder and explosives. They then produced various kinds of explosive devices themselves. In each hamlet and village we had a workshop for producing these devices.

LE THI MA: We unscrewed the detonators first of all, then used a saw to cut the bombs in half. We scraped the powder into two large cauldrons, bigger than this one here. Next we melted the powder down into a thick liquid and poured it into a container like this one, until it was completely full. We then made a detonator and inserted it here.

We placed these mines along the routes we knew the tanks were going to take. When the tanks went by they would hit this thing here, exploding the mine and causing the tank to turn over.

DUONG SANG: We had many old people who took part in the fighting. Have you heard of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Ranh, who was over 80 years old when she became a military heroine? We had many men and women who were more than 50 years old when they became heroes and heroines in the struggle against the United States. The children were even more active and creative. They mostly used homemade weapons, manufactured precisely to fight the enemy in each area.

NARRATOR: American pilots had been bombing in South Vietnam since 1961. Vinh Binh province, April 26, 1965.

On July 1, the Vietcong mortared the U.S. air base at Danang. American Marines were deployed to nearby Cam Ne, a cluster of hamlets. They drew fire.

THOMAS MURPHY: As we started moving, some of those so-called "civilians" quote, unquote, as is on the news, got killed. At this time some of the Marines used cigarette lighters and the hooches went up, grenades, some flame throwers were brought in and that was one way to quiet the fire from the village.

COL. RAY SNYDER: I told the squad leaders to approach it on simply a case-by-case basis and use their own judgment, that we were not getting a heavy volume of fire, that they should be able to pinpoint, at least to some extent, the source of the fire.

THOMAS MURPHY: I don't think that an order had come down to burn the village, but I think it was just something that was carried on through the operation.

NGO THI HIEN: The Americans shelled the village as they arrived. Then they burned down the houses, destroying everything. Nine members of my family were killed. I escaped which is why I'm alive today. But my whole family was wiped out.

NGUYEN THI THIEP: Many people were wounded. Where I'm sitting now, one person was shot as she returned from harvesting rice. She was taken to hospital and there she died.

NGUYEN THI THE: The Americans came into my house with their interpreters and drove us out. They refused to let us take any belongings with us.

THOMAS MURPHY: An eight-year-old or a nine-year-old can kill you just as quick as a 25 or 26-year-old man. Now these people have been fighting this war a long long time. Some of these people were actually fighting wars when they were nine, ten, and eleven years old. Where, back here in the States, the kids were playing cowboys and indians. Over there they had been playing it for real.

COL. RAY SNYDER: We did encounter a problem which, which was ultimately to become a very difficult situation in that we had -- I'd gotten a report from one of my squads that they had been fired on from behind. It meant either that our search was not sufficiently adequate or that we were facing some other kind of a problem, and that perhaps they had come from some other area of the village and come in behind us, or whatever.

TRAN NHAT BANG: I witnessed the destruction, because I was fighting there. After our clash with the Americans, my comrades and I ran along the communication trenches to our hidden shelters where the villagers could help us.

NGO THI HIEN: Wherever the Americans went, they burned and destroyed and killed. I didn't see any guerrillas being killed, only villagers.

TRAN NHAT BANG: On that day they couldn't locate any of us guerrilla fighters. Our unit suffered no casualties at all.

NARRATOR: In North Vietnam, villagers and militia now faced regular American bombing attacks. Called Operation Rolling Thunder, the bombing had started in March 1965. The bombing was planned to last a few weeks -- a few months at most. It continued for more than three years.

ROBINSON RISNER (POW 1965-1973): I was going right up Route 1, north from Thanh Hoa. I had to raise up to go over the hill just a little, and when I did, I was receiving automatic weapons fire right down my nose from some fixed positions, and I never quite reached my target. And they just shot me to pieces.

NARRATOR: The official list of bombing targets grew, from army and navy bases and radar sites to railways, roads, bridges and anything that resembled a military vehicle.

ROBINSON RISNER: When my head emerged above the rice, in the rice paddy, I looked right down a gun bore, and I didn't have my gun aimed at this guy, so I had to make a decision. Am I going to make a fight because this guy was -- already had a gun right in my head and I changed my mind. I remember telling the guys I would never be captured. But I changed my mind, and I dropped the gun without uncocking it. I ground it in the mud with my feet hoping they wouldn't find it, but an old one-eyed villager had seen it, seen me with it, saw me drop it.

He came up and while they were forcing me to kneel and tied my arms very painfully behind me, he searched around until he found it. And then he picked it up and I remember still, the water and the mud dripping from it, and he put the barrel between my eyes and I watched his finger almost as though I were fascinated or hypnotized. And I watched his finger curl around the trigger guard knowing full well he didn't know how finely tuned that trigger was and that was the only time out of my entire prison career that I ever wondered for even a milli-second if I were coming back alive or not.

NARRATOR: In South Vietnam, American aircraft met less resistance.

1965 CANADIAN DOCUMENTARY FILM: SKYRAIDER MISSION

"OK, his bomb bursts... should hit now!"

(EXPLOSION)

"OK, look out to the right now. OK, right down there. Napalm now! There it goes...Ah, look at it burn, look at it burn!"

PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH: *The American imperialists have invaded the South with their troops and have tried to destroy the North with their aircraft. Thus they have committed untold crimes against the people of both regions. Vietnam is one. The Vietnamese people are one. As compatriots, the people in the North will do everything within their power to support the struggle of the people in the South.*

NARRATOR: As their troops and supplies moved to the battlefield, Hanoi's leaders repeatedly denied that their army was fighting in the South, claiming that the charge was a myth fabricated by the United States. To stop the flow, America stepped up the bombing campaign. North Vietnam responded by moving its factories into the countryside. The civilian economy was suffering, but the country was being mobilized with Ho Chi Minh's slogan: "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom."

Earlier, Ho's Communist allies had discouraged his efforts to reunify Vietnam. In 1957, the Soviet Union even proposed that two Vietnams be admitted to the United Nations. But with the North under attack, the aid from Communist powers was increased. They sent weapons, fuel, rice, agricultural and industrial equipment.

GENERAL VO NGUYEN GIAP: We received help from sister countries -- from the U.S.S.R., from China, which had a stand different from the one she has now. Not only did we enjoy growing international help and support from other socialist nations, but also from the progressive forces in all other countries.

1967 FRENCH NEWSREEL (Subtitles): *On December 13 and 14, 1966, the escalation reached the center of the North Vietnamese capital.*

This is the first film received from Hanoi.

Four districts were bombed. Entire neighborhoods of small houses were blown up or destroyed by fire.

Despite the French Press Agency reports from Hanoi, Washington only admitted the facts after several denials.

DR. TON THAT TUNG: As the bombs were falling our hearts naturally throbbed with fear. But when that happened we either carried the stretcher out to bring in the wounded or went out to visit the injured, and our fear dissipated as a result. My experience was that fear arose when you sat there worrying about things. But when you kept yourselves occupied, you lost your fear.

EVERETT ALVAREZ: One evening of July the 6, they came around and gave us new pajamas that we wore. These had numbers stamped, they had stamped numbers on our pajamas. We were always so hopeful and optimistic that this thing was going to end and we figured, ah hah, this is step number one and we're going to be going home guys. We were sort of feeling good about this, and as we started walking, you know, I thought we were going to walk right around the park. But no, as we got to the opening of a big street, I looked -- we could see down, and it was just, I mean this was, this was the New Year's Eve parade. I mean there was just thousands of people in stands and along the streets and as we started to march, I could hear the cheerleaders with megaphones getting the crowd going. And one of the interrogators, we called "the Rabbit," he saw me, and he turned to the crowd and he was leading them in this cheer. The cheer said, "Alvarez, Alvarez, son of a bitch, son of a bitch."

So pretty soon the whole cheering section started, you know. You know, I had played sports before, but this was a different sport altogether. But we progressed down, the crowd started to press in, and the guards would come along and they'd tell you to bow to the people, bow to the people. You know, I was just trying to keep my head, not to bow, but I was just trying to head in that direction. And after a few blocks of this the crowds became uncontrollable and they started throwing things. And then somebody hit from behind and I was, I just about went out, next thing I know, I was sort of drowsy and we were led to the infield and sat there, and they brought us all in, we all made it.

ROBINSON RISNER: Then they started with my wrists, with my arms behind my back, and wrapped my arms together under the armpits. Well, the two arms were together and they just pulled my shoulders out of joint, you know; that, and they did some similar things to my legs. I tried

to endure the pain knowing that an American military man should be able to endure torture until he died, but never to give nothing to the enemy (never give anything to the enemy). And I tried my best, and my best wasn't good enough.

And during the night I heard someone screaming in the distance and I thought, my, they're torturing another prisoner, and I felt so sorry for him, you know. And then I could come back more closely to consciousness, and found out that it was me I was hearing in the distance; I was the one who was doing the screaming. And they tortured me all night. And by daylight, they had reduced me to such a place that I would give them more than name, rank, serial number and dates of birth.

And they hurt me pretty bad. They pulled my shoulders out of joint, and they did some things to my legs. But I found out that I was not as strong as I thought. I couldn't be tortured to death, that my will would give before my heart stopped beating. It was very disconcerting. I lived in abject misery for the rest of the time I was a prisoner.

NARRATOR: The bombing in the South continued without let-up. But it never stopped the flow of supplies and manpower to the Vietcong bases.

Many bases were tunnels stretching for hundreds of yards underground. Some, like the major Vietcong base at Cu Chi, only 20 miles from Saigon, were never destroyed.

DUONG SANG: We used Cu Chi as a training base and staging area. We enlisted recruits in Saigon and trained them here, in the tunnels. We raised their political consciousness and taught them tactical skills preparing them for big assignments such as attacking large enemy hotels. They learned to use automobiles and Honda motorcycles -- firing hand guns to hit the enemy with a single shot.

In the city, we had people who specialized in forging documents. Whenever the enemy produced any kind of document, we were always able to acquire a copy and produce an exact replica, right in the heart of Saigon itself.

NGUYEN THI ANH: I lived in Danang along with other sisters who participated in the revolution. We organized clandestine activities, and provided communication between the revolutionary base area and the city. We carried out political struggles against the enemy.

NARRATOR: Vietcong spies and agents continually passed useful information to the guerrilla bases. Couriers and saboteurs depended on sympathizers in the local population for their protection. If caught, they expected little mercy.

NGUYEN THI ANH: They tried to force me to confess that I was involved with the Vietcong. I refused to make such a statement and so they stuck needles under the tips of my ten fingernails saying that if I did not write down what they wanted, and admit to being Vietcong, then they would continue the torture.

But I was determined to say nothing. I was extremely angry at the enemy and I loved my country so much. This was because everyday, bombs and shells and the blood and bones of my people appeared before my eyes. I was extremely outraged and would never come out with any information.

They tied my nipples to electric wires, then gave me electric shocks, knocking me to the floor every time they did so. They said if they did not get the necessary information they would continue with the torture. Two American advisers were always standing on either side of me.

NARRATOR: Coastal towns and villages in the southern part of North Vietnam were constantly shelled and bombed by American warships and aircraft. People took refuge in tunnels.

HO MINH SAC (tunnel builder/manager): We spent more than two years building the whole complex. The largest number of people living in the tunnel at any one time was more than a thousand. The lowest number was more than 200.

NGO THI TAM (woman in tunnel): My house had been bombed and I had to give birth to my baby in the tunnel. We remained underground for two months. There was little food to eat or clothes to wear. There was no

firewood to cook with and little water to drink. All day long, I was going in and out of the tunnel trying to get water for my child.

HO THANH DAM (schoolteacher): They dropped napalm bombs and I was injured. Napalm bombs saturated the whole village, engulfing it in a gigantic fire.

When I was hit, the napalm set my whole body on fire. I lost consciousness. Many people died. Their bodies had been torn to pieces. Some of the pieces hung from the branches of trees and other pieces were covered with dirt thrown up by the explosion.

Some people were so shocked by the terrifying scene that they turned around and went back into the tunnel. But then the tunnel collapsed and they were buried alive.

NARRATOR: B-52 bombers had begun to bomb the South in June 1965. By April 1965, they were bombing the North.

GENERAL GIAP: The American Air Force is a very powerful air force, and naturally it influenced the battlefield. It was a great trump card. The Americans counted on their air force to somehow change the course of events.

PHAM VAN DONG: It must not be forgotten that General Curtis Lemay had said that the United States should bomb Vietnam back into the Stone Age. But they were greatly mistaken. The destruction of the North -- with all the efforts and all the barbarity of imperial America -- only caused the people to be more resilient and more resolute in their determination to resist and to win.

The key factor in the struggle was the opening up of a trail -- appropriately called the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" -- to link the North to the South. The United States used every means at its disposal to block the trail. But to no avail.

The Ho Chi Minh Trail, developed day by day, becoming a network of roads over which weapons, military supplies and tens of thousands of soldiers were moved into the South for combat.

CAPT. TRAN VAN NGO: I left the North, taking three months to reach the South. On the way, we constantly faced flares, all kinds of bombs and rockets. We couldn't stop for any time along the route until we had reached our resting place. Then we would sleep in hammocks, and begin marching again at four o'clock the next morning.

NARRATOR: The Ho Chi Minh Trail was not a single trail, but a web of trails, some threading through Laos and Cambodia. They were kept open by armies of women, many drafted into service for two years at a time.

Throughout 1967, more and more soldiers were moving from north to south every month.

TRAN NHAT BANG: The northern brothers came here to fight because of their sense of solidarity and responsibility toward us. After all, this was not their native village and they did not have to fight here. There were never any problems between us southerners and northerners.

We guerrillas fought behind the enemy lines, disrupting his rear. We concluded that only with the regular forces would we be able to fight the big battles.

NARRATOR: The North Vietnamese troops were highly disciplined and tightly controlled. As in the Chinese Communist army, each soldier belonged to a three-man cell.

CAPT. NGUYEN VAN NGHI: When we encountered difficulties, the three-man cell functioned as one. If one of us was killed, the others suffered terribly. And that made us hate the American imperialists even more.

CAPT. TRAN VAN NGO: I killed three American soldiers when the American forces attacked Dsiem Hang.

We waited for them in ambush. We engaged them in close combat and I killed them with my bayonet. After this battle, my morale was very high because I had contributed to the liberation of the South.

CAPT. DANG XUAN TEO: We had a slogan, "To fight the Americans, you must cling to their belts." If we fought them at a distance we suffered a

lot of casualties.

CAPT. NGUYEN VAN NGHI: Having fought against American troops many times, I came to the conclusion that they had a lot of bombs and shells -- that they were very powerful as far as war materials were concerned. But they did not fight very well at all. They moved very slowly and really were not that mobile.

NARRATOR: In both North and South Vietnam, daily life accommodated to the rhythms of war.

DR. TUNG: We always know when they were about to drop their bombs. For example, in the morning, they usually arrived about ten o'clock, just after breakfast. Then they took a break, and went back to their bases for lunch. Then they came back to drop their bombs again at about three in the afternoon. Since this was the routine, we tailored our schedule accordingly. We began our surgery at about five in the morning, and took a break at nine or ten.

When the bombs didn't fall on time, we felt extremely uncomfortable, wondering why they hadn't fallen yet. This wasn't fear. We simply wanted the bombing to be over with so that we could get back to our work.

NARRATOR: By 1968, Soviet-made missiles and anti-aircraft batteries ringed Hanoi.

DR. TUNG: At that time, we were filled with fervor. I can tell you, there's something strange about the Vietnamese. They could never remain long in a bomb shelter. Whenever an airplane was shot down, everybody including doctors rushed out to look at it.

NARRATOR: By 1967, nearly every military target in the North had been damaged or destroyed. But the bombing had not broken North Vietnamese moral nor stopped the flow of men and supplies to the South. Operation Rolling Thunder had failed.

GENERAL GIAP: They had spread the hostilities over the entire territory of our country. It was absolutely normal and necessary for us to mobilize all our forces -- political and military -- in order to carry on the struggle and to reach final victory.

NARRATOR: In January 1968, 20,000 northern troops moved south. They were poised for a fresh ambitious offensive -- the "Tet" offensive.

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